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Honolulu Star-Bulletin

HONOLULU, HAWAII, THURSDAY, SEPT. 10, 1959

Honolulu Star-Bulletin, Vol. 48, No. 216 ★★★★★

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Special



The phantom Air Force U-2, black and without markings, prepares for take off on a flight so secret even guesses may not match its fantastic true mission. — Air Force Photo.

Pilots Indicate Strange Plane Here Spies on Russia, China Land Areas

By MARK WATERS

Are the U.S. Air Force's mystery U-2 jet planes, including the one now at Hickam Air Force Base, used for reconnaissance at unreachable altitudes over Red China and Soviet Russia?

Ask questions at Hickam about this strange, black, single-seater, single-engine plane without markings and

all you get are blank stares.

But quiz U.S. Armed Forces pilots in the Far East on whether we are flying reconnaissance over China and they'll look at you as if you were slightly potty and ask sharply, "What do you think?" meaning "of course."

A pilot on Formosa told me last spring that our intelligence on China is better

than any we have ever had anywhere.

According to him, the Chinese People's Army can't move an artillery piece without it being seen and reported by our high flying reconnaissance planes.

The U-2 at Hickam is one of a kind that has been flying since 1956. The Air Force has more than 25 of them.

It has a Pratt and Whitney J-57 jet engine and a wing so long and flexible that outrigger wheels must support it on the ground.

These wheels are really dollies which drop off by themselves as soon as the plane gains a little speed.

It is a strange sight to see an airman riding each wing. Turn to Page 1-A, Column 4

Secret Plane

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tip as the U-2 begins its take-off run and jumping off just in time.

They do this to keep the dollies in place until the wings have enough lift to keep from scraping the runway.

The wing spread gives the mystery plane an ungainly look but great lift and high performance above 70,000 feet in rarified atmosphere at the fringes of space.

It can cruise for hours beyond the reach of any known aircraft and perhaps has "anti-radar" to ward off detection by unfriendly radar.

While cruising at these high altitudes, the U-2 can probe any terrain through its cloud-piercing radar eye.

It is so at home in thin atmosphere that one pilot jokingly said it can fly without burning fuel but on the fumes.

It has taken overhead photographs of hurricanes while flying more than 15 miles high.

It has been rumored as a "nuclear sample" catcher over Siberia.

Its services, or what it does, are utilized by all the U.S. Armed Forces.

It is said to be involved with the Pacific missile range.

CLOSELY GUARDED

But the Air Force keeps it under wraps in a closed and guarded hangar at Hickam except when it is taken out for flight, and then spectators are kept at a great distance.

It is so highly guarded that two full colonels from the high-and-mighty Pacific Air Forces headquarters staff were told gruffly to "shove off" when they asked to get near the black enigma.

A local television cameraman had his film confiscated when he photographed the plane from a respectable distance.

The true mission of the mystery plane, now highly classified, may be more fantastic than the wildest suppositions.